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Center for Victims of Torture Seeks Probe

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MINNEAPOLIS (AP) - A group that helps international victims of torture called for an independent investigation into allegations of prisoner abuse in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The Minneapolis-based Center for Victims of Torture said it is sending letters to President Bush and the Minnesota congressional delegation, asking for an independent commission. The group also said Sunday that the U.S. must provide torture victims with legal help and medical and psychological rehabilitation.

Under recent criticism, White House and Pentagon officials have been defending the conditions and treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay almost daily. On Sunday, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told NBC's "Meet the Press" that an independent investigation into conditions there doesn't make sense.

Over the weekend, Republicans and Democrats visited Guantanamo Bay to view the conditions for themselves. An estimated 540 detainees are in Cuba - some have been held for three years without being charged with any crimes.

Democratic Rep. Ed Case, D-Hawaii, said Sunday that the Guantanamo prison for terrorists was being run well and did not match allegations the detainees were being abused and tortured.

Speaking to reporters by telephone from Washington after his trip to the prison, Case said he watched from behind a one-way mirror while detainees were interrogated and talked to doctors at the prison hospital.

His 16-member congressional delegation also freely questioned the prison's guards and saw detainees kept in a lower-level security camp, he said.

"I think Gitmo is being operated well and operated in a way that is necessary to the safety and security of our country and in a way that is humane under the circumstances," Case said, using the prison's nickname.

Back in Minneapolis, more than 120 people signed the letters to President Bush, asking for the independent investigations.

"We have to show that we're not afraid to investigate ourselves," said Rep. Betty McCollum, a Democrat who attended the event. McCollum said repeated allegations of torture and abuse need "the disinfectant of sunlight" that an independent investigation could provide.

In an interview Friday, Lt. Commander Joe Carpenter, a Pentagon spokesman, said a small percentage of the 70,000 detainees in Iraq, Afghanistan and Cuba have been mistreated.

"The fact that there has been some mistreatment is unacceptable," Carpenter said. About a half-dozen military personnel have been convicted or have entered guilty pleas in the widely-publicized abuse

scandal at the Abu Gharib prison in Iraq.

The Center for Victims of Torture, celebrating its 20th anniversary Sunday, was the first U.S. organization created to help victims of politically motivated torture.

Associated Press Writer Audrey McAvoy in Honolulu contributed to this report.

On the Net:

Center for Victims of Torture: <http://www.cvt.org> (PROFILE (COUNTRY:Afghanistan; ISOCOUNTRY3:AFG; UNTOP:142; UN2ND:062; APGROUP:Asia;) (COUNTRY:Cuba; ISOCOUNTRY3:CUB; UNTOP:419; UN2ND:029; APGROUP:LatinAmerica;) (COUNTRY:Iraq; ISOCOUNTRY3:IRQ; UNTOP:142; UN2ND:145; APGROUP:MiddleEast; APGROUP:Asia;) (COUNTRY:United States; ISOCOUNTRY3:USA; UNTOP:021; APGROUP:NorthAmerica;)

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